UNITED NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/AC.109/PV.1426
16 August 1993

ENGLISH

SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION WITH REGARD TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECLARATION ON THE GRANTING OF INDEPENDENCE TO COLONIAL COUNTRIES AND PEOPLES

VERBATIM RECORD OF THE 1426TH MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Tuesday, 20 July 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. LOHIA (Papua New Guinea)

- Question of New Caledonia

  Hearing of petitioners

- Report of the Subcommittee on Small Territories, Petitions, Information and Assistance (continued)

  Questions of American Samoa, Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Guam, Montserrat, Tokelau, Turks and Caicos Islands and United States Virgin Islands

  Question of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

- 100th Report of the Working Group

- Organization of work

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The meeting was called to order at 11.15 a.m.

QUESTION OF NEW CALEDONIA (A/AC.109/1170)

HEARING OF PETITIONERS

The CHAIRMAN: Members have before them a request for hearing relating to New Caledonia, which was circulated in aide-mémoire 23/93. If there are no objections, may I take it that the Committee accedes to the request?

It was so decided.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Yann Céléne Uregei (Congrès Populaire) took a place at the Committee table.

The CHAIRMAN: I call now on Mr. Uregei.

Mr. UREGEI (interpretation from French): I am speaking in the name of the People's Congress, and I should like to thank you, Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Kanak people, for inviting us to participate in the work of the decolonization Committee and to assure you of our close cooperation.

(Mr. Uregei)

The Matignon Agreements are four years old. At its last meetings, the Committee to Monitor the Agreements arrived at a positive assessment of the Agreements. This did not astonish us. But apart from the rain of governmental manna over the Territory, what is the reality of social and economic policies since 1988?

From the outset, we denounced the plan's deceit. The partition of the Territory into three provinces, one of them containing 89 per cent of the Territory's Europeans and nearly all the business and trading enterprises, concentrated at Nouméa, relegates the two other rural Kanak-majority, pro-independence provinces to economic dependence on the loyalist South and sows the seeds of separatism. Hence, we can have no illusions about the Agreements, which deny the Kanak people its right to decide on its future and which delay indefinitely the possibility of independence, subordinating it to a referendum 10 years in the future, in which Kanak voters will remain a minority.

There are two basic criticisms: first, the Agreements' inability to counterbalance the demographic and economic imbalances between Nouméa and the rest of the Territory and, secondly, continued white hegemony in all areas of society.

What has happened over these four years? In Nouméa two housing-related phenomena strike us: the proliferation of huts and the construction of luxury buildings, which reflect Nouméa's population growth and its attraction to people from the other two provinces. From Baie de la Moselle to Magenta, along the sea coast are new buildings: high-rent luxury buildings, with a three-room flat renting for 130,000 francs. These rents are affordable only by public officials and those in private enterprise. Often, the State

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reimburses expatriate officials for all or part of their rent, as do many businesses. The State and businesses thus contribute to the high rents and to the wealth of the building owners and land-owners in general. Modestly paid workers and other employees have great difficulty finding housing.

The first huts appeared in order to ease this housing shortage; others were built by tenants driven out of their homes by excessively high rents. Gradually, unused land was covered by sheet-metal huts - precarious housing, but unfortunately housing destined for long habitation - without running water or electricity, and with poor sanitary facilities. The hut-dwellers, or squatters as they are called, are the target of sometimes brutal pressure.

At the same time, there has been a change in the status of the Social Fund for Housing, the body that administers the employers' 1 per cent, allowing elected officials to serve on the Fund. As the Southern Province has more congressional representatives than the other two provinces combined, members of the Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR) form the majority in the delegations of elected officials. As in many other bodies, this reform actually strengthens both the presence and the influence of the combined loyalist right, with employers and RPCR members forming an alliance.

Hence, it is no surprise that public housing has not increased and that the needs of Kanak families go unmet. Moreover, in Nouméa tenants must pay a deposit. In New Caledonia, public housing is not allocated to those who need it most.

In recent years, the construction industry has enjoyed spectacular prosperity. December 1992 showed a net slowdown: the big administrative infrastructures of the North and the Islands are nearing completion. Local

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businesses have not benefitted much from these projects and must generally compete with subsidiaries of French firms which have the technical skills needed for this work. Hiring a few temporary workers and subcontracting some of the work to Northern Province businesses is not enough to reverse the trend, particularly when, as in the case of the Kone Tiwaka highway, it amounts to allocating the most difficult and least profitable work to those businesses. In fact, public investment in this sector has contributed little to the development of a local economy. The main beneficiaries have been European-controlled businesses based in Nouméa. As in the past, the Territory's economic activity has been transforming public money into private capital, which is then reinvested in France or elsewhere abroad.

The Matignon Agreements have not changed the structure of the colonial economy. Local agricultural production continues to face competition from imported produce; taxes artificially inflate the price of local produce to the same level as that of imports. This price-fixing benefits imported produce, whose quality and packaging remain better.

Among the tribal population, local markets selling local produce have appeared along the roadsides, but cooperatives are confronted by the lobby of European importers and distributors wishing to maintain their monopoly, who often work hand in hand with caldoche business owners. In fact, the Rocard plan has strenghened the grip of the right-wing forces on the Territory.

Carving up the island electorally has given the right-wing forces a majority in the Congress. This enables them to influence provincial budgets and on all decisions within their purview. Consular organs are in their hands, along with the various administrative councils, social-security organs

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and territorial enterprises such as CAFAT, the Social Fund for Housing and Air Calédonie, where their alliance with the many small trade unions gives them dominance in the taking of political and economic decisions. Air Calédonie, an airline managed by Congress, is run chaotically. There are two conflicting policies: representatives of the Southern Province want to develop tourist traffic, while regular air links are indispensable to meet the needs of isolated populations, particularly on the islands.

Michel Rocard's avowed goal was to keep New Caledonia in the French Republic. The increase in transfers by more than 10 per cent a year, for example, could not but increase a certain dependency on Paris and shore up an artificial economy.

The Kanaks are finding out that inter-regional balance based on tourism is only exacerbating inequities in development. It favours some and marginalizes others, in the process doing a little more to destroy social and traditional solidarity.

The Kanak population is facing a new kind of problem linked to the financing the French Government is injecting into the Territory. Rumours that some pro-independence leaders have secretly grown rich are a sign of the social malaise of the Kanaks, who clearly do not understand certain economic facts, such as the purchase of an aeroplane by a Northern Province leader when the rank and file have to trudge along wrecked roads when they travel from the tribal centre to the village. We should not be surprised at this discrepancy.

During the last meetings of the Committee to Monitor the Matignon Agreements, former Prime Minister Pierre Bérégovoy cynically said,

(Mr. Uregei)

"The economic and social development to which you are all rightly devoted must benefit everyone. We must avoid a portion of the Melanesian population viewing development projects with skepticism, disappointment and, later, hostility. That would happen if certain people do not see a tangible improvement in their daily lives: I refer to those who live in the bush and to the young people living on the outskirts of Nouméa".

(Mr. Uregei)

The outcome of the Matignon Agreements is not benefiting the Kanak people, who are in the same social situation as they were before they were implemented. The Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Situation in New Caledonia notes that three years after the Matignon Agreements were signed, the essential problems facing the Kanak people, including the lack of a solution, had been at the root of the shift to a situation of confrontation, the 1984 insurrection and the Ouvea tragedy; far from finding the germ of a solution, those problems have become even more serious, and the Kanak people today find their unity, and their very existence, in jeopardy. The Independent Commission of Inquiry on the Situation in New Caledonia deems that the French Government's policy in New Caledonia runs counter to democracy, international law, justice and ethics.

In the recent elections to the legislatures for the whole Territory the results were as follows: 73.86 per cent anti-independence; 4.18 per cent unknown and only 21.93 per cent for independence. Two right-wing Deputies got through in the first round, and it is possible that the loyalist right will take all three provinces in the provincial elections in 1995, enabling the Rassemblement pour la Calédonie dans la République (RPCR), with the assistance of the new Government, to impose the statutory consensus, because it did not request the referendum.

On 26 July 1991 - during the visit of the socialist Minister for Overseas Departments and Territories - the president of the RPCR endorsed the idea advanced publicly by the president of L'Union Calédonienne, François Burk, that the whole purpose of the 1998 referendum would quite simply be to ratify the statutory consensus; this trend against independence will become even more pronounced with the change of majority in power in France.

(Mr. Uregei)

In April 1993, you yourself, Mr. Chairman, accompanied Mr. John Kaputin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Papua New Guinea, on a visit around the three provinces resulting from the Matignon Agreements. You discovered on the ground what the political, economic and social realities of our country are.

These realities were the basis for our decision to step outside the colonial way of thinking and base the Kanak people's demands fully on customary tradition. On 24 September 1992, the First People's Congress, constituted by the customary High Chiefs, formally established the authority of the Kanak people within their own country. To mark this great event, the customary High Chiefs raised the flag symbolizing the sovereignty of the Kanak people in their country.

The Kanak people demand their innate and active right to the independence that de Gaule recognized for the Algerian people. We demand that the following sacred, innate and active rights of the Kanak people be accorded recognition in practice: the right to be recognized as a fully-fledged people; the right to be considered the sole legitimate people of the Kanak country; the right to exercise self-determination in dignity and freedom; the right to obtain restitution of all their lands so that the Kanak country can be established as an integral whole; and the right to exercise, immediately and with no conditions or reservations, their sovereignty, enabling them freely to choose their political status: socialist Kanak independence.

The First People's Congress took into account the importance of the environmental issue, as examined by the independent States and by the various non-governmental organizations world wide. Given the pollution and damage caused by mining that directly affect the Kanak people, we decided to compile a dossier for each cultural area with the assistance of a suitably qualified

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international expert so that we could submit to the International Court of Justice at The Hague a complete dossier for the purpose of obtaining compensation for the damage caused by each and every mine operator. We request the Committee to help us compile that dossier.

The CHAIRMAN: I should like to ask Mr. Uregei one question concerning the visit of the Foreign Minister of Papua New Guinea to New Caledonia recently; I had the pleasure of accompanying him at that time.

I thank Mr. Uregei for his continuing participation and for providing us with information concerning developments in the Territory.

While in New Caledonia, we heard from a number of sources that there is a scheme in New Caledonia whereby monies are paid to people on the basis of the number of children they have: it is something like a pension. We did not verify this, but I should like to know if you have any information about this kind of pension paid to families on the basis of the number of children they have; I believe they collect this money once a month and then go back to their villages. I have no evidence to verify this, but we did hear from many sources that this activity was going on.

Mr. UREGEI (interpretation from French): I have no supporting evidence to give you regarding this information, but it seems that it is at province level that these things are done - at the level of the provinces arising out of the Matignon Agreements. I personally cannot give you any very precise evidence regarding the problem you have mentioned.

Mr. DIARRA (Mali) (interpretation from French): I should like to thank Mr. Uregei for his presentation of the situation prevailing in the Territory of New Caledonia. I personally had the opportunity, as a delegate

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of the Committee at the Seminar that was recently held in Port Moresby, of hearing Mr. Uregei make a statement there.

I should like to refer to the working paper submitted to us by the Secretariat regarding the situation in the Territory (A/AC.109/1170). Nowhere in the working paper do I see any statement regarding the United Nations system with reference to promoting the economic or social development of the Territory, and I should like to ask if Mr. Uregei could perhaps make some general comments regarding what he knows about activities by the United Nations system in New Caledonia's economy and society, apart from what the Special Committee is doing. Are there other United Nations bodies active in New Caledonia?

Mr. UREGEI (interpretation from French): I would refer to the petition I just presented; for the people of our Territory, the Kanak people, ever since the Matignon Agreements were applied, i.e., for four years now, we feel that the outcome has not been to their benefit. Of course, we could draw up reports on the basis of the statements of Ministers passing through New Caledonia, but in reality, on the ground, the social situation for the Kanak people remains unchanged.

The CHAIRMAN: I thank Mr. Uregei for the additional information he has just provided to assist the Committee in its work.

The petitioner withdrew.

The CHAIRMAN: The Committee will continue consideration of the question of New Caledonia after the meeting of the South Pacific Forum in August.

REPORT OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON SMALL TERRITORIES, PETITIONS, INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE (continued)

QUESTIONS OF AMERICAN SAMOA, ANGUILLA, BERMUDA, BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS, CAYMAN ISLANDS, GUAM, MONTSERRAT, TOKELAU, TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS AND UNITED STATES VIRGIN ISLANDS (A/AC.109/L.1796)

The CHAIRMAN: On the basis of the consultations that have been held between the members of the Committtee, we have agreed to defer consideration of this matter until next Tuesday afternoon's meeting.

QUESTION OF THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

The CHAIRMAN: In respect of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, I wish to draw members' attention to the recommendation of the open-ended Working Group, adopted at the 1414th meeting, on 28 May 1993, which stated that,

"taking into account the intention of the Government of Palau to hold a plebiscite on 27 July 1993 regarding the Compact of Free Association, recommends that the Committee suspend consideration of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands until 1994". (A/AC.109/L.1795, para. 16)

In keeping with that decision, the Committee will defer consideration of the question to its 1994 session.

It was so decided.

100TH REPORT OF THE WORKING GROUP (A/AC.109/L.1804)

The CHAIRMAN: Owing to our further consultations on the 10 Territories in the draft consolidated resolution, we shall also defer consideration of this item until next week.

ORGANIZATION OF WORK

The CHAIRMAN: As I informed the Committee yesterday, I shall be attending the Economic and Social Council meetings for the purpose of its consideration of the draft resolution in relation to the specialized agencies. In this regard, I should like to urge members to consult on an appropriate draft resolution in relation to the specialized agencies, and other draft resolutions, in order to assist the Committee to conclude its work as early as possible.

The Committee will take up consideration of the remaining items on the agenda at its future meetings.

The meeting rose at 11.45 a.m.